

George Orwell - Animal Farm - Worksheet 4 - Historical Background

The plot of *Animal Farm* parallels some of the main events of the Russian revolution and subsequent events until WWII. What follows is a brief history of events in Russia between 1917 and 1945. Some sections of the text have been marked to show direct parallels in *Animal Farm*. Find the corresponding event in *Animal Farm* and describe it in a short phrase.



BEFORE 1917

- 1 Until 1917 Russia was ruled by an Emperor, called the Czar. The ruling class was rich and powerful, but compared with the rest of Europe Russia was a backward country, most of the population being poor rural peasants. Even when the Czar tried to
- 2 industrialize the country in the last years of the nineteenth century, the peasants who moved into the towns found themselves in appalling living conditions, with low wages and not enough to eat. There were some organised protests against the repressive regime, but most of these were brutally put down and the leaders imprisoned. The Czar tried a few experiments in democracy, notably a Russian parliament called the Duma, but they did little to ease the poverty.

When Russia entered the First World War in 1914 the Czar's position seemed reasonably secure, but there followed a series of defeats which, coupled with dreadful lack of organisation, meant that by 1917 Russia was in a state of collapse. In the early weeks of 1917 many soldiers began to desert, and in February there were major demonstrations in the capital, Petrograd, against the conduct of the war. Nicholas II, the Czar, realized he had little support and gave up power.

1917 REVOLUTION

For eight months there was a period of uncertainty, with a Provisional Government trying to both fight the war and hold the country together. Finally in October 1917 Lenin, who led the Bolshevik party, decided the time was right to seize power in the name of the workers. Street fighting continued for ten days, and ended with the Bolsheviks capturing the Winter Palace, and holding a meeting there. In 1905 the Palace had been the scene of brutal repression, when hundreds of people holding a peaceful demonstration had been killed by the Czar's soldiers, and the entering of it by the Bolsheviks was an important symbolic gesture.

LENIN TAKES CONTROL

- 5 Lenin proclaimed the first socialist state where all workers could have a say in the running of the country. Many of his ideas came from Karl Marx, a German economist, whose major work *Das Kapital* proposed a society in which all people would be free and equal. Marx died in 1883 and never saw the revolution he had inspired. Lenin had worked towards this revolution for many years, and an effective part of his agitation had been the use of simple but effective slogans to
- 6 help people understand the aims of the revolution.

- 7 When he and the Bolsheviks gained power they faced enormous problems. The combination of years of inefficient government by the Czar, and the effects of the First World War, meant that the economy had collapsed, there was little food, and there were huge outbreaks of typhus and influenza. From 1918 to 1921 there was a civil war, and many foreign countries, alarmed that their workers might take over in the same way, sent troops to fight against the Bolsheviks.

- 8 After three years of bitter fighting the Bolsheviks gained control of Russia, though the country was still very weak. In 1924 Lenin died, and there followed a struggle for power between Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky. Stalin was a silent cunning man, who was General Secretary of the Communist (previously Bolshevik) party. He posed as a moderate man, carrying out Lenin's policies. He was not interested in spreading revolution abroad, and his main aim was to build up Russia as a strong country – 'Socialism in One Country'. Trotsky was a brilliant speaker and had been in charge of the Red Army during the Civil War. He wanted to see the revolution spread throughout the world – 'Permanent Revolution'. Both men had their supporters within the party, and for a period of two years there was much discussion within the party about the direction the newly formed Soviet Union should take.

STALIN TAKES CONTROL

- 10 By 1926 Stalin was able to discredit Trotsky, and in 1927 he was deported, to be permanently exiled in 1929. From this time onwards, whenever Stalin met with problems inside the country, he blamed the difficulties on Trotsky, who he claimed was working with foreign powers against the Soviet Union.
- 11 By 1928 Stalin was virtual ruler of the Soviet Union which seemed a contradiction to many Soviet people. What they could understand of the views of Karl Marx seemed to be very different to the way the Soviet Union was moving. To the ordinary Russian Stalin seemed more like a Czar than a man trying to build the 'new society' based on the views of Marx and Lenin. It was also very confusing for them to understand Stalin's own views. In 1921 he had been against the rapid industrialisation of Russia; yet in 1928 he had decided to start Russia on her first 5 Year Plan – an attempt to industrialise the country quickly and at the same time 'collectivise' the peasants, i.e. put them in large state farms. This was vigorously opposed by the Kulaks, land-owning peasants, and in 1929 many of them burnt their farms and killed their cattle to prevent them falling into the hands of the government.
- 12
- 13
- 14

REPRESSION

15 When faced by opposition, Stalin tended to adopt brutal, simple solutions. Those who refused to accept the propaganda given out by the State were either killed or exiled to remote areas. When Kirov, the Leningrad party boss, was murdered in 1934, it marked the start of a period of 'show trials' of leading party members who admitted to crimes they almost certainly could not have carried out. Stalin had them removed as he felt they posed a threat to his rule. Many millions of ordinary Russians were killed or uprooted and all branches of society suffered badly. Out of these
16 'purges' the Stalin 'cult of personality' arose, whereby everyone was to see Stalin as a sort of god-like figure.

With regard to foreign policy, Stalin realised that a Communist government was not popular with the governments of other states and when Hitler came to power in 1933, fascism became his greatest worry. The Soviet Union joined the League of Nations in 1934 and Stalin tried desperately to find allies against Hitler. When this seemed impossible, in 1939, he
17 actually signed a treaty with Hitler. This Nazi-Soviet pact seemed unbelievable to many in the Soviet Union but with the second world war looming Stalin needed time to build up his country to face a superior
18 military power like Germany. In 1941 Germany attacked the Soviet Union and for the next two years the Soviet people had to endure incredible hardship to survive against Hitler. During this time Stalin rallied the Russian people around himself – he had misread foreign affairs and now wanted to give the impression that only his leadership and the sacrifice of the Russian people would give victory. From 1941-43 Stalin encouraged his new allies, America, Britain and France, to start a second front to help ease the situation in the Soviet Union but because of his previous position, this help was not forthcoming.

THE RISE OF THE SOVIET UNION

19 Even though Stalin's economic figures are difficult to believe, and untrue in certain areas, the rise of the Soviet Union as one of the world's greatest industrial powers took place in the 1930's and was only stopped for a while at the end of the 1930's by war. The human sacrifice was very great and the consumer benefits virtually nil. Stalin concentrated on the build up of heavy industry and even though there were many mistakes and failures, by 1939 Stalin had laid down the pattern for the future.

During the war which followed, the Soviet people often found it difficult to understand Stalin's thinking, for at times past 'enemies' were now to be seen as
20 'friends' and much of the propaganda of the past 10 years was re-written. Stalin was able to get away with this because he controlled all aspects of Soviet life. The sort of society which had been created, with a powerful ruling elite, seemed to many people a long way from the original ideals of Marx and Lenin.

No. 1 - Jones in charge of Animal (Manor) Farm.

No. 2 -

No. 3 -

No. 4 -

No. 5 -

No. 6 -

No. 7 -

No. 8 -

No. 9 -

No. 10 -

No. 11 -

No. 12 -

No. 13 -

No. 14 -

No. 15 -

No. 16 -

No. 17 -

No. 18 -

No. 19 -

No. 20 -

Animal Farm characters - who do they symbolise?

Animal Farm.....

Old Major.....

Mr. Jones.....

Napoleon.....

Snowball.....

Napoleon's dogs.....

Moses.....

Source text:

KEITH, Lois; SIMONS, Michael; STEPHENS, John. *Animal Farm*. London: English & Media Centre, 1995, pp. 33-35.